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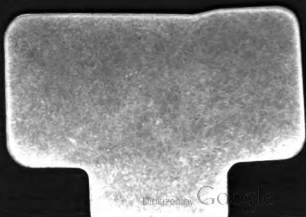
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REFLECTIONS
ON THE STATIONS
OF THE CROSS



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REFLECTIONS
ON THE
STATIONS OF THE CROSS:

OR
The Love of Jesus in His Passion.

BY THE
VERY REV. D. CANON GILBERT, D.D., V.G.,
AUTHOR OF THE 'LOVE OF JESUS, OR TRIBUTE TO
THE BLESSED SACRAMENT,' ETC.



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INTRODUCTION.

THE 'Reflections on the Stations of the Cross' were delivered on the Thursday evenings, to the members of the congregation of St. Mary's, Moorfields.

Since then several persons have requested that they might be published, in the belief that they would help many to love Him more 'who was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins,' (Is. liii. 5,) and would enable them to bear more calmly and resignedly, the sorrows, the misfortunes, and the crosses of life.

With this hope I have consented to publish them, though fully conscious of their many deficiencies, and how very inadequately the all-absorbing subject of the Passion of our Lord has been treated.

May I ask those who read these 'Reflections,' when they are kneeling under the shadow of the Cross on Calvary, sometimes to pray for the Author,

DANIEL GILBERT.

*Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross,
Sept. 14th, 1875.*

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PREPARATORY PRAYER.

How sad is the road to Calvary ! The blood-stained footprints of Jesus mark the way !

There is where the great God Incarnate fell under His Cross ; there His flesh was torn with lashes ; and there the thorns were beaten into His sacred head. There is where they blindfolded Him, and in mockery cried out, 'Tell us, O Galilean, who struck Thee ?' There is where Jesus, covered with wounds and blood, met His broken-hearted Mother ; and there is Golgotha, the mount of death.

We, who turn cowards at every suffering, who run from every cross, and rebel at every humiliation, let us come and learn to suffer with Jesus. Let us enter on the way of the cross, that we may sympathise with His unspeakable agonies, and detest and abhor the cause of them, our own sins ; and let us resolve to bear patiently and manfully every pain and every bereavement, that may fall on us in our journey through the valley of death.

Suffering and afflicted Jesus, teach us to do this. Let not, we implore Thee, any crushing misfortune, the darkest tribulation, separate us from Thee, but like Thy blessed Mother let us keep with Thee, devotedly, unswervingly, till the end. Amen.

1. JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

Angels of heaven, stand amazed to see your King and your God thus impiously condemned to death.

Pilate said to the Jews: 'Behold the Man,' (John xix. 5,) for he thought the sight of that miserable and crushed form, would touch their hearts and make them relent.

But marvel not at their hard-heartedness, for though that same appeal has been so often made to us in sermons, and in the whisperings of grace, have we not, like the stiff-necked Jews, by our sins, and especially by that favourite sin, which we refuse to abandon, cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him; crucify Him!' (John xix. 15.)

If some of us may be innocent of the blood of the Son of God, have we not all, by

our self-love, impatience, and other sins, wounded and pained our Lord? Have we not, like the cowardly Pilate, said, 'I will chastise Him therefore, and release Him.' (Luke xxiii. 16.)

But it must be so no more.

Let us now, dearest Lord, look so earnestly upon Thee, that our hearts may be melted with compassion for Thee. Take the cords from Thy hands, afflicted Jesus, and bind our perverse wills so securely, that we may never rebel again, that we may never again offend Thee by the least wilful sin.

And in that dreadful day, when we stand trembling before Thee to be judged, be more merciful to us than we have been to Thee; and even judge us now, punish us as Thou wilt, so that hereafter we may escape the last terrible sentence of death.

And if it shall please Thee to humble us, and to purify us as gold in the furnace, grant that the sad picture of Jesus, so unjustly hurried away to death, may ever be present to our minds for our consolation and encouragement.

When we are misunderstood and unjustly condemned by those who call themselves our

friends, when others with contemptuous severity censure the folly and the conduct, which have brought shame and confusion upon us ; when by the jealousy, the ambition, and the designing schemes of others, our characters are blackened, and the honours, the position, and the employments we have fairly won are taken from us ; when we are cruelly and unjustly kept in the background, remind us, dear Jesus, of Thy words to Pilate : ' Thou shouldst not have any power against Me, unless it were given thee from above,' (John xix. 11 ;) and, forgetting the malice of men, help us patiently and meekly to bow down to God's holy will. When evil tongues and wicked minds steal our friends from us, or poison and turn the hearts that once beat warmly for us into bitterness, and even perhaps hatred ; make us remember, that it was to teach us to bear these trials to our pride, that Thou didst submit to be judged and to be so wrongly condemned. When we are tempted to give scornful judgments and recriminations against those who have neither mercy nor pity on our failings and shortcomings ; when we think the least shadow of injustice or unkindness, is sufficient to excuse

our resentment, remind us that Thou didst stand meekly and silently, whilst with fierce hate and cold cruelty, Thy own creatures pronounced sentence of death upon Thee, and make us imitate Thy blessed example.

'Tis a bitter and difficult lesson to learn, but cost what it will, we are determined to succeed.

Blessed Joseph, who wast fearfully calumniated by your own brethren, and condemned and cast into prison as a base violater of the virtue for the love of which you would willingly have died, pray for us.

Chaste Susanna, sentenced to death for the perpetration of a crime of which you were as innocent as the angels, and which you loathed and detested as the very seraphim, intercede for us.

Dear St. Francis of Sales, who had your handwriting forged to convict you of a crime the thought of which never found a resting-place in your soul, help us, we implore you, to walk in your footsteps.

All you saints, confessors, and martyrs, who were falsely accused, and condemned for crimes the commission of which would have made your blood cease to flow, and your heart stop

beating with horror, pray for us, that we may imitate your glorious examples. Intercede for us, that we may copy our dear Master Jesus as you have done. Help us, that we may meekly but bravely confront our enemies, however horribly false the accusation may be; however keen the pain, however overwhelming the confusion, or whatever may be the bitter consequences. And when we are unable to justify ourselves, and when we fail to avert the wrong that has been done us, assist us that we may bear with serenity and patience, the unjust judgments that have been given against us, as did our Blessed Lord when He was so impiously sentenced to death. Heaven grant that it may be so! Amen.

2. JESUS RECEIVES THE CROSS.

With what patience and love our dear Lord received and embraced the Cross we gave Him, heavy with the multitude of our sins, loaded with the intolerable burden of our daily offences.

Gaze upon Him, crushed with grief, bending under its heavy weight, yet carrying it

with unruffled calmness and fortitude. O what a contrast to our weak and cowardly conduct! He has given us a cross to bear, in the sorrow, the affliction, the humiliation, or the bereavement which is now saddening our souls, and He has tenderly proportioned it to our weakness; and yet we chafe and murmur and try to cast it away, or impatiently crave for another in exchange. Say not we can support it no longer, for how slight is it compared to the crushing and overwhelming afflictions some have to endure.

Suffering Jesus, it is so light, a child could carry it; it does not deserve the name of a cross. Could not we, who shrink so much from suffering, bear a heavier one and not murmur, if it were to please one of Thy creatures? Have we not chosen many a weightier one to please ourselves? O what a reproach it ought to be to us that we can undergo fatigue, hardship, and fretful anxiety, without repining—ay, even with pleasure—for the world, for a little gain, and that we cannot endure the least inconvenience, the slightest trouble or opposition, for heaven and eternity! We are ready to give up our wealth, to undertake perilous journeys, to risk our lives for some one who is

very dear to us, but to please Jesus, who loves us with an affection beyond the capacity of man's little heart to comprehend, we can peril nothing, we can endure nothing. We cannot accept a petty trial or trivial cross, without murmuring, without proclaiming to every one the burden that is on our shoulders, without seeking for sympathy from every one who crosses our path, and which real men and women, much less Christian men and women, would be ashamed to notice or acknowledge.

But it must be so no more. We are now resolved to endure every affliction it may please God to send without repining, without publishing our sorrow to the world, without seeking for sympathy; except it be from some particular friend, or from some wise and prudent counsellor whose advice we need.

Compassionate God, teach us the royal secret of bearing our cross. Convince us that every trial and sorrow which cannot be avoided, comes from Thee, and is Thy gift. Never let us forget, that an hour's smarting under our cross, pleases Thee more than weeks on Thabor, and that a day of tribulation and misfortune, merits more than months of unclouded happiness. Open our eyes, that we may see

and remember that, when we are willing and ready to take up our cross, Thou dost come Thyself and carry the burden for us, and that Thy presence always makes it easy and sweet to suffer.

Tender-hearted Jesus, with Thy example before us, bending under Thy heavy Cross, we are determined to walk in Thy footsteps, and to bear every adversity, trial, and grief, it may please Thee to send us, with fortitude and resignation. And when we have learnt to look at crosses as so many memorials of Thy love to us, as so many disguised blessings and hidden mercies, perhaps we may dare to look forward to that blessed day, when we shall love our cross so dearly, as to venture to ask for a still heavier one, as a yet greater proof of Thy love for us.

All ye lovers of the Cross, for whom the bright hope of heaven and the sympathy of Jesus was all you needed in the most excruciating pains, in the direst calamities; who loved the Cross so well that you sought for misfortune, pain, and humiliation as real pleasures and untold gains; pray, we supplicate you, that we may imitate your glorious examples, and that at least we may bear all

the ordinary trials of life without murmuring, without complaining, without seeking for sympathy ; calmly and contentedly, and even with joy.

Bright spirits who hover round God's throne, help us to keep this resolution faithfully, which we now wish to do in all the sincerity of our souls. Amen.

3. JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME.

Jesus, fainting and exhausted under His crushing burden, is unable to proceed further, and the maddened Jews beat and drag Him forward on His painful journey, till at last He falls down like some over-driven worn-out animal. What grief, what indignation should we not feel, if we saw a poor dumb beast thus tortured ; and O, stolid and hardened sinners that we are, who is this Outcast, this Malefactor, this Man of Sorrows ? He is none other than the Incarnate Son of God, the Infinite, the Immense, the Boundless, the Alpha and Omega, the King of kings and Lord of lords !

If we read for the first time this piteous story, our hearts would beat fast with horror and sympathy ; but, fools that we are, it is not a mere sorrowful tale of martyrdom that happened to a stranger eighteen hundred years ago. It is no stranger who now lies helpless on the ground, crushed with pain and sorrow ; it is Jesus, our Beloved, our own Jesus, who knows us as none can know us, who has heard all our secret sorrows, and who has listened to our most petty trials. It is the very same Jesus who perhaps rested in our hearts this morning, who is waiting for us in the Tabernacle, and at whose feet we hope to kneel before the day closes. It is our Brother, who provides for us each day ; our Friend in whom we trust ; our God in whom we live.

Now gaze on Jesus, prostrate on the ground, utterly powerless and helpless to rise, and say, what was it caused Him to suffer so much ?

Good God ! can we be ignorant of the cause, or have we forgotten it, as a trivial thing of the past ? O no ; it was our sins, it was our sin of yesterday, it will be our sin of to-morrow, and perhaps the very scourge that lashed Him has scarcely been laid out of our hands.

Suffering Jesus, can we believe this, and

not cast ourselves on the ground, and weep bitterly for what we have done. If we saw a beggar thus afflicted and humbled, the tears would start in our eyes ; but the cruelty is not in our hearts, nor the nerve in our bodies, coldly and deliberately thus to torture the most miserable outcast. Yet this is what we have done ruthlessly to our dearest Friend, our own Brother, our Jesus and our God.

O Jesus, we are smitten with sorrow to the depths of our souls for all our sins, for the sins of our youth, for that sin of last week, for that horrible sin which, at this moment perhaps, is festering and corrupting our souls. We hate and loathe them ; and kneeling at Thy side, lying under the Cross ; we are fixed and resolved to rise up from them, and to make a sincere confession, and to allow no temptation, no allurements, to make us sin again. Pardon and forgive us, for now at least we feel heartily and sincerely sorry for all our transgressions. Help and assist us, that we may never grieve Thee more, and that for ever we may turn away from those iniquities which we now so sincerely detest and deplore. But give us, we earnestly beg of Thee, the best and the highest and the most

perfect sorrow. Teach us how to grieve for our sins, not through fear of Thy punishment or the hope of reward; not even by the consideration of the overwhelming sufferings of Thy Passion only, but for Thy own sake, for God's sake, and for His infinite perfections which we have dared to outrage by sin. Impart to us the golden secret of winning back the favour of Heaven, and of cancelling all the debts we have contracted, however numerous and revolting our crimes may be; for such sorrow, joined with confession, if it be intense enough, not only blots out the guilt of sin as though it had never been, but remits entirely all the temporal punishment due to every past sins. O that we could acquire this perfect sorrow! Then, if death were suddenly to come upon us, and a priest could not be had, and confession could not be made, such an act of contrition, if it were fully earnest and sincere, would obtain pardon for all our sins, and all the temporal punishment registered against us. So much so, that if we were to die the moment after, without hindrance or delay or passing through Purgatory, our souls would be in the unclouded possession of Heaven.

But further, dear Lord, make us daily to

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remember that, if our venial sins be unnumbered as the atoms of the air, or the sands on the beach, one little act of perfect contrition, without confession, will obliterate them and all the temporal punishments they may involve.

Dearest Jesus, teach us thus to repent of our sins. Help us to study Thy unselfish and deep love, manifested in Thy bitter Passion, so that we may rise to the contemplation of the infinite love of God and His other boundless attributes; and then leaden indeed must be the mind, and unfeeling the heart, that cannot be sorry for having offended God for His own sake.

All ye disinterested and unselfish followers of the Cross, who knew no more absorbing motive for love, or overwhelming incentive for sorrow and repentance, than God Himself; for His own sake teach us to walk even remotely in your footsteps, so that the motive of our sorrow for sin may always be, because we have grieved and outraged a Person so infinitely wise, beautiful, powerful, and loving as God is. Amen.

4. JESUS IS MET BY HIS BLESSED MOTHER.

How bitterly sad and sorrowful is this heart-rending meeting of Jesus and Mary. How is that Mother's soul rent with grief, to see her only Son, the only Person she ever loved, or could love, thus loaded with insult and ignominy, covered with blood and dust, and tottering under the crushing burden of His Cross.

How deep and true must be her love ! Sterling and unselfish love knows no fear. Its depths are never so truly stirred, as when the loved one is in sorrow, misfortune, and disgrace ; and it knows no stronger magnet, than when those who are dearest are reviled and condemned, and without one to pity them. And so it is with the Blessed Virgin. She heeds not the scorn of the Roman soldiers, nor the yells of the Jewish rabble ; for that Child, drenched with misfortune, the thorns on His head, the cords on His hands, and the infuriated mob dragging Him to death, is dearer than ever to her, and she rests not till she is locked in His embrace, and her tears and sobs tell how great, even as the sea, is her sorrow.

It is comparatively easy to mourn alone or in secret; but galling is the pang, to suffer midst scorn and derision, and to behold those we love in bitter sorrow, by reason of our misfortunes. Yet Jesus chose to see His Mother, amidst the execrations of the Jewish mob, and overwhelmed with affliction, that He might leave us an example of heroism, and that we might learn, not to murmur at the miseries and sadness of those we love.

When some crushing calamity and disgrace suddenly overtakes us, and our hearts shrink within us in horror, and we are tempted to fly away from the face of those who condemn us; O let us remember this sad meeting of Mother and Child, in the midst of a jeering and merciless crowd; and it will nerve us to be men, and not cowards, and to bear bravely the sting and confusion of our humiliation, however great it may be. When we see those who are most prized, in adversity and suffering; when those who are fathers behold their wives and children bitterly weeping, because their shattered strength will no longer allow them to labour for their maintenance and support, and their hearts grow cold and sick at the spectacle; let us remember how Jesus

bore the mighty sorrow of His afflicted Mother, and let us promise henceforth to endure the griefs of our friends, manfully and resolutely.

How often, dear Jesus, have we gazed upon Thee and promised to be resigned, and how often have we failed ! And so it will be again, unless Thou dost powerfully assist us. Help us, that this may be a genuine promise never to be broken. Assist us, we implore Thee, to face those trials bravely and without a murmur, which are the heaviest and the bitterest to meet ; the sorrow, the misfortune, the disgrace, the poverty, and the ruin we have brought unintentionally or otherwise on our families, on our friends, and on those who hold the best place in our hearts.

But further, dear Lord, let us love Thee with a true, unselfish, and generous affection, like Thy afflicted Mother. Let us love Thee with a genuine love—a love which knows no vanity or human respect, and that never dreams of what the world or creatures will think or say, when Thy interests, dear Jesus, are concerned. Let our one absorbing thought be, what will please Thee, and win Thy loving approbation.

O how different, how unreal, how superficial is our love ! Well-nigh every action is

encrusted with vanity and human respect. It seems almost impossible to have a single thought or deed, that is not tainted with the world or creatures. How many things are left undone for Jesus, through fear of the remarks and condemnation of men ! How many spiritual actions are enveloped in the thought only of what friends and neighbours will think and say ! How many dreams and imaginations are there, in which we revel in the praise and admiration of creatures ! How often do we openly seek for human approbation ! How frequently do we, by every device, in every covert way, try to elicit and steal from others, fulsome flattery, and the acknowledgment of our superiority over surrounding rivals ! The more we sound the depths of our souls, the more we shall seem to find, that the spring of every thought, feeling, word, and deed is this detestable vanity or human respect.

It is humiliating to have to confess this ; yet, sorrowful Mother, if you will assist us, we shall be sure to succeed in eradicating these detestable vices. Destroy and crush, we crave of you, these blights and worms which wither true love. Empty our souls of

this vanity and human respect, that we may give your Son a pure and undefiled service. Aid us also, that when in society, or in the world, we see your Son ignored, derided, and contemned, like you, we may deem it a privilege, an honour, and glory, to proclaim our love and faith in Him more loudly and more ardently than ever. Assist us, that we may love Him after your example truly, devotedly, and unselfishly.

All ye saints, who by tribulation, or by the cleansing fires of Purgatory, have had your love of God purified from the dross of wrong and earthly motives, think of us, pray for us, poor weak and erring wanderers, that even remotely, we may imitate your bright and glorious examples. Amen.

5. THE CROSS IS LAID UPON SIMON OF CYRENE.

Gaze upon Jesus, so exhausted, so crushed by suffering that even the granite-hearted Jews are moved to pity, and they force Simon

of Cyrene to ease Him of His heavy burden, and carry His cross.

Are our hearts harder than those of the Jews? If not, why are not our eyes filled with tears and our souls stirred with emotion? And whilst we pretend to envy that Cyrenian his royal privilege, what do we do to comfort Jesus and to lessen the overwhelming weight of His cross?

The truest sympathy, the best consolation in sorrow, is union of thought and feeling with the one loved. And as Jesus is truly the Man of Sorrows, we can alleviate His bitter affliction, by walking in His footprints; by bearing our troubles and pains for His sake; and by learning the golden truth, that He is always very near us, when we have some cross laid upon us; and that the heavier the trial, the nearer and dearer we are to Him.

O that we could learn this lesson really! What a brightness it would spread over every sorrow, and what peace and even happiness might be found, in the very thorns which grow up in our path!

Compassionate Jesus, sometimes we think if we could always have Thee in our hearts;

if we could feel Thee near us, as in the few minutes after Holy Communion; if at every breath we could draw Thee from the Tabernacle into our souls, then indeed we should be courageous and happy in the midst of the sharpest trials.

But how deluded we are! The possession of Thee, which we can have, we despise and shrink from. The light weight of the cross, by which we know for certain Thou art with us, is irksome to us; and we shake off the loving pressure of Thy hand in some cross, which is only heavy enough, to make us feel Thou art with us. Sometimes we see this, and then we dread nothing so much as to lose Thee.

Do not weary of our impatience, dearest Lord. We are blind and stupid. But when we learn the heavenly secret, that the pressure of the cross is Thy presence also, then we shall clasp it close to our hearts, and thank Thee for it with all our souls. And though we are weak and unable to do anything, we will not fear, for Thou art all-powerful. Help us, patient and long-suffering Jesus, we implore Thee, to bear at least every cross we cannot avoid, with submission and fortitude,

and then we may humbly hope one day to be able to ask for a weightier cross, or to take one voluntarily on ourselves, that we may be bound nearer and closer to Thee than ever. And when we have learnt this primary Christian lesson, how light and easy will our trials and afflictions become; not only by the consolation we shall receive, and by reason of the bright hope of reward awaiting us in a better world, but even here we shall experience such help and comfort as it never entered our minds to expect.

And when we have advanced thus far, that we readily and willingly accept the trials it may please God to send, though we may be ready to sink under the burden, fear not, for our Father is very near, and rather than we should be crushed by our misfortune, He will touch the heart of some stranger to pity us, and another Simon will come forward and carry the burden we can no longer bear.

How often, in the past, has God been thus kind and merciful to us! When our own flesh and blood, when friends failed us, when we knew not where to look for help or sympathy, how frequently has the Providence of Heaven come to our assistance, in a manner

which those who have no faith would call chance, luck, or accident.

Dearest Jesus, henceforth we put ourselves entirely and implicitly into Thy hands. Send us help in our tribulations and sorrows, if such be Thy pleasure; but if such be not Thy will, we are ready to suffer without human consolation. But God knows how frail, wayward, erring, and changeable we are, especially in bearing crosses and sufferings. Therefore stand by us. Let us have the comfort of Thy presence, and we are content. Do not, we implore Thee, tender and compassionate Jesus, deny our request. Amen.

6. THE FACE OF JESUS IS WIPED BY VERONICA.

Jesus looks on His right hand and on His left, and there seems no one to help Him, for the powers that condemn Him are too strong to be opposed. Can a weak and helpless woman do anything against an infuriated crowd?

O afflicted Jesus, a loving heart can al-

ways devise something. Blessed Veronica beholds the blood pour down from His thorny crown ; she sees that His hands are tied, and that He cannot raise them ; and she comes forth, and wipes His face reverently and tenderly, and all ages venerate and envy her that great honour.

We are quick enough with sympathy and acts of kindness, when those we love suffer, we have always some expedient to help them, or to show them that we long to assist them.

'Tis only towards Thee, dear Jesus, that we are cold, and stupidly wait to be assured that we can offer acts of reparation, and that Thou wilt accept them as proofs of our love.

How much, suffering Jesus, we could do to comfort Thee, to assuage Thine agonizing sorrow, if our hearts were less hardened. We could ponder with affection on all Thou didst endure in Thy cruel Passion from Gethsemane to Golgotha, and above all on the untold love and grief, which tore Thy soul with pangs well-nigh unto death. When we see Thy hands again bound, and the blood streaming down Thy sacred face, and when as of old we hear Thee reviled, mocked, and derided, we could tell Thee how grieved we are ; and we could,

with all the fervour of our souls, again renew our love and allegiance. We could assure Thee, with all the energy and earnestness we possess, that if we had the power, no mocker should outrage Thee, no Jew should insult Thee.

But we could do more. We could give an alms to the poor, or put flowers or candles on Thy altar, as a poor compensation for the injuries Thy enemies are inflicting on Thee ; and we could pray from the depths of our souls, that death may rather take us away than that we should ever offend Thee again. And these heart-felt sentiments and offerings would be a solace to Thee, our suffering Jesus ; for Thou dost prize, and long for, the most trifling proofs of love, the smallest gifts, if they come from sincere and devoted hearts.

Dearest Lord, let us never forget the great joy with which Thou didst receive and repay that trivial tender act of St. Veronica's. Let us bear away on our hearts the impression of that piteous and loving face, so that all earthly beauty may seem to be a vain blank, after that sorrowful weary look of Thine, that sought for us amid the crowd of Thy enemies, asking if we had no deed of love to offer Thee.

Make us ever remember, we entreat Thee, that a kind look or word, a loving desire, the smallest offering, a tear, a sigh, a kiss on the Crucifix, on Thy pallid lips, or on Thy open wounds, are like so many sunbeams over Thy dark affliction.

Let us feel sure and certain, beyond doubt, that these manifestations of tender and loving souls gladden Thy heart, and are a sweet comfort in the midst of the contempts, the outrages, and the cruelties Thy enemies are heaping upon Thee. Thou knowest, loving Jesus, that we are frail and weak and unable to do much; but miserable and destitute, and utterly without emotion must he be, who cannot thus love and serve Thee.

Therefore do we now sincerely promise henceforth constantly to perform little acts of affection, like St. Veronica, and always to feel for and sympathise with Thy humiliations and sufferings, and to manifest the truth of our feelings by external manifestations, however trivial and unimportant they may be in themselves. God grant this may be a genuine and practical resolution never to be broken. St. Veronica, pray that it may be so. Amen.

7. JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME.

Still weaker and more exhausted, Jesus totters along, till nature is utterly overpowered, and in the midst of the gibes and blows of His enemies, He falls a second time under His Cross.

Look at the Lord of the Universe, unable any longer to bear His heavy burden, trembling under its galling weight, and say who now need be ashamed to feel the pressure of sorrow and pain crushing him to the ground.

When suffering and the repeated buffets of misfortune have so worn us out that we feel we can hold up no longer, when we have hoped and prayed that the bitter trial rending our souls might be removed, and to our sad disappointment its weight has been increased every day, every hour, till in sheer exhaustion our strength has given way; then, like Jesus, let us bear our weakness, let us lie patiently under our affliction, till He helps us to rise again.

And, O compassionate Jesus, the comfort thus to be found in suffering with Thee! We can tell Thee the sorrow, the pain, and the anxiety which none but Thou canst under-

stand. We can say how much we dread our cross, how we shrink from every pain, and Thou wilt whisper words of strength, peace, and fortitude into our souls; and we shall feel fresh vigour, to bear silently and patiently every cross, every affliction, that is prostrating us to the earth.

But Thou knowest, dear Jesus, how weak and inconstant we are; and how the cross which to-day seems light as gossamer, to-morrow weighs us down like lead; and how the trial which last week we could smile at, now bends us down with such crushing sadness that we are tempted to exclaim, better far to die than to bear such misery.

And so it will be again, unless Thou dost surround and support us with Thy powerful help. Give us Thy assistance, we implore Thee, in all our trials and afflictions, and let us not suffer alone, for without Thee we are sure to be cowardly and faint-hearted.

When we are tempted to rebel and cast our cross away, let Thy words of warning echo in our ears, 'He that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me is not worthy of Me;' (Matt. x. 38;) and 'Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after Me, cannot be my dis-

ciple;' (Luke xiv. 27;) and 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.' (Luke ix. 23.)

Then these words will nerve us to bear courageously whatever affliction and bereavement it may please Thee to send us, because there is no other way of being Thy disciples and sharing in the reward of Thy faithful followers, viz. unclouded happiness and unbroken peace with Thee for ever and ever.

Suffering Master, we want to be Thy true disciples; and as there is but one way, the royal road of the Cross, we promise to-day to accept every misfortune, every contradiction, every wound, which cuts into the most sensitive part of our nature, and every tribulation which cannot be avoided.

Moreover, we resolve to accept them without a murmur, with internal calmness and resignation, without asking Thee to change the Cross which Thou hast shaped and fashioned with Thy own wounded hands, till Thou deemest fit to do so for our own spiritual good or Thy own honour and glory.

What a hard and difficult promise we have made, if left to ourselves; but, walking in Thy footsteps, we feel certain in our own poor

way that we can do this and more in the spirit of St. Paul, who declared, 'I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.' (Phil. iv. 13.)

All ye true disciples of our Crucified Master, help us to keep our resolutions. Aid us to bear every cross, whatever its weight and form, and however bitter its pressure. Ye saints, from your bright thrones look down upon us, that we may learn to bear suffering and mourning, because, like you, we are sure to be comforted. Amen.

8. THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM MOURN FOR OUR LORD.

Do not the words of our Lord loudly reproach us, when He bids the women of Jerusalem weep rather for themselves than over Him? How often are we touched with human compassion for our Saviour's sufferings, zealous, as we deem it, for His honour; and all the while, it is over our own sins we ought to weep and lament, which have overwhelmed Him with such afflictions and humiliations?

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And if we will not, or rather cannot, mourn for our unnumbered crimes and iniquities, can the tears we shed for our Saviour's unutterable agony, and the pains inflicted by the cruel whips and the thorns, be more than a delusion, the effusion of a sensitive nature? Is it not a mockery to weep for the effect, and to be indifferent about the cause; to be grieved at the open wounds in the body of Jesus, and to love and caress the sins which made these wounds?

When we are touched by some sermon on the Passion, when we gaze on the crucifix, and our hearts throb at all the sad memories which are awakened, then let the words of Jesus echo in our ears, 'Weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves.' (Luke xxiii. 28.)

Dear Jesus, how many tears have we wasted over disappointed self-love, over imaginary sorrows, over petty slights that we forget the next day; and yet the hideous mass of our sins which must be paid for by Thy precious Blood does not move us to a single tear, and scarcely produces a formal, dry act of contrition! Tears are too precious to be wasted on every trifle, when they will not flow for deadly sin—the greatest misfortune

in the world, and the most terrible evil that can befall our friends.

Dear Lord, henceforth we dedicate our tears to Thee; they can wash out our sins, and they can comfort Thee in Thy distress. They are sacred therefore, and we entreat Thee never suffer them to be shed for any vain or earthly sorrow, when they will not flow in torrents for the base and shameful sins which have wounded Thee so much. O, what a reproach it is to Christians—to those who pretend to be men and women, to cry like the veriest babies at every pain and contradiction, to spend restless hours and sleepless nights, and to sodden their pillows with weeping for some affliction, some misfortune, which will pass away before the next week—and to be stolid, indifferent, dry as Arabian sands, over the death of our Saviour, the loss of Heaven, and being condemned to a miserable eternity!

O, Thou who didst weep over Jerusalem, create within us new hearts. Change the channel of our mourning into its right course. Give us tears, give us sorrow, but for Thee and our transgressions against Thee; and make us grieve for every fault that stains

our souls, and displeases Thee. And if we have the dire misfortune by sin to lose Thy love and friendship, let our nights be sleepless and our eyes swollen with grief, and our hearts heavy with sadness, till we have won back Thy favour, and Thou hast said, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' (Matt. ix. 2.) If our friends and those who are dearest are buried in iniquity, and are wholly indifferent as to their deplorable state, let us show them by our wretchedness, by our tears, that we feel more for the miserable condition they are in, than for any earthly misfortune which could overtake them.

Grant us, compassionate Lord, thus to mourn, thus to be sorrowful, and we shall be utterly ashamed to be any longer like drivelling infants, whimpering children, peevish and fretting for broken bubbles, fleeting shadows, and miserable trifles.

Penitent David, who mingled your tears for your transgressions with your meat and drink, teach us to mourn as you did. Blessed Peter, whose tears made a furrow on your cheeks, so constant and unbroken was your grief, obtain for us the tears of true contrition.

Repentant Magdalene, whose tears flowed

in torrents, so as to wash the feet of Jesus, make us mourn, make us lament, make our tears flow like yours; not for the world, not for creatures, but for our sins, and for having offended One who is Mighty, Immense, and Infinite in all His attributes. Amen.

9. JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME.

Can that crushed Form suffer more and yet live? Can that tottering Body be still more weakened, and nevertheless courageously advance up the mountain of death?

Gaze well upon Jesus as He falls heavily to the ground for the third time, livid, exhausted and almost dead. Draw near, and learn from our suffering Lord how to bear the cross which it seems impossible to carry any longer; how to rise and walk under the killing affliction which, self-love proclaims, is more than human nature can bear.

When our horizon becomes darkened, when we find ourselves in strange and mysterious paths, and we know not whither they lead, when we are verily in the way of the Cross, bear, bear, though our hearts be well-nigh broken. When everything we touch goes

wrong; when even the kindness of friends turns to our detriment; when those to whom we have confided our secret sorrows, our peculiar and special trials, only call the affliction which is undermining our existence weakness, delusion, imagination, because our grief is beyond the comprehension of their little minds and narrow souls,—O, murmur not, though our souls be sad, and our lives bleak and dreary!

When we feel that God's hand is heavily against us, and our overwhelming afflictions are crushing us to the ground, be not cowardly, faint not by the way; for there may be much more we can and must bear, if we would be true disciples of the Man of Sorrows.

When the whole sky is darkened, when tribulations come, not with intervals of days, but every hour, extinguishing every hope and comfort, though our whole being be sick with affliction, though time after time we fall from sheer exhaustion under our heavy griefs, though we are tempted to say, let death come and end this misery—do not; but let us pause and ask why—why does the Father, who loves so dearly, thus afflict us, thus torture us well-nigh unto death?

And what is the answer that echoes in our ears? Listen! for it is the voice of our Father, saying, 'Patience yet awhile, My children, for your misfortunes and afflictions are permitted or sent, for the same reason that My well-beloved Son lies now under the Cross for the third time.' It is that sin may be no more; that we may be forced through sorrow and adversity to give up those pet sins, against which even the love of the broken heart of Jesus has pleaded in vain.

And who could not bear any grief, any affliction, and for any length of time, when we know they are the last loving efforts of our Father to make us love Him in return; when they are so many proofs that He values more than creation our personal and individual love, however poor and worthless it may be.

Yes, tenderest of Fathers, this thought shall be the star to guide and cheer us through every dark tempest that may sweep over us. Henceforth we promise to bear the keenest sorrow, the sharpest struggle, any misfortune, if they will only break down every impediment that may prevent our hearts beating in unison with the heart of Jesus. And if there be no other way to keep our fickle nature

true, to preserve us from the dreadful calamity of sin, let our lives be lives of misfortune ; let us be men of sorrow like our Saviour, and we will never murmur or complain.

But more than this. We are now determined to abandon every sin, every obstacle, that keeps us from Thee, be it excessive affection for creatures, a luxuriant self-love or detestable pride, or by whatever name it may be called ; not because Thou hast punished us, and that the chastisement may be removed, but because Thou hast made us see clearly the evil of our ways.

There was a time, perhaps, when there was some excuse for our sins ; when, like the Jews, we knew not what we did ; or, being young disciples, we fled after the example of others. But now, dear Jesus, when we know Thee and all Thou art, when Thou askest so little, when Thou hast made us see that sin is so hideous and Thy paths so easy, how miserably base and weak we must be ever to offend Thee again.

Strengthen us, sweet and patient Lord, and however slowly we go on in the path of virtue, however wearily we may walk, save us from another fall into sin. Above all, save us from

that horrid pride and self-complacency which may compel Thee to suffer us to fall, to humble and to warn us. Humble us as Thou wilt, break down our pride with Thy power, choose what means Thou seest best, but save us, for Thy mercy's sake, from ever again grievously offending Thee. Tell us Thyself that we are nothing—let the whole world tell us so—humble us as Thou wilt before creatures, before our neighbours, before our friends, rather than that we should have to learn humility by the horrible experience of losing Thy love. From the depths of our souls we implore Thee that we may never grieve Thee again, and that we may endure tribulations and sufferings in the spirit of reparation and penance, and gratefully accept them, because they are sent to guard us from that terrible monster—sin. From our hearts we promise to bear every humiliation that comes in our way, which cannot be avoided. We resolve never to answer without just cause, when we are reproached and condemned; and though the crimson is in our cheeks, and the sting in our hearts, we will say with David, 'It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me;' (Ps. cxviii. 71;) and when our

souls begin to swell with pride we will cry out, 'Dust and ashes, why art thou proud?' 'What hast thou, that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?' (1 Cor. iv. 7.)

And when people are loud in their praise of us, we will repeat, 'Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to Thy name give glory.' (Ps. cxiii. 1.) Thus we will act and thus we will pray, till in the deepest chamber of our hearts, we are convinced that we are nothing, and that whatever we have is God's gift; and then we shall be humble, then we shall be covered with an impenetrable breastplate that will protect us from every danger, and especially from our besetting sins, which we now detest from our hearts.

And when, later on, we have acquired a deeper and truer knowledge of ourselves and God, we may humbly hope to seek and accept voluntary humiliations, because we shall thereby walk unswervingly in Thy footprints, and shall be more like our Divine Master, who hath 'Humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross.' (Phil. ii. 8.)

All you bright and happy saints in heaven,

who have reached the home of your desires by the hidden and unseen paths of humility, intercede for us, we implore you, that we may ever walk in your footsteps. Amen.

10. JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS.

What more can the enemies of Jesus do? They have stripped Him of His honour, they have wounded and bruised His sacred body till there is no strength or soundness left therein, and now they tear off His garments, and rudely reopen every wound, and again the precious blood flows down in streams.

Even these poor garments our dear Lord will not retain, and so He gives up all for us, to show us how to be generous for the love of Him.

And how many things are we bound to abandon, and how much do we profess to sacrifice, and all the while is it not with bitterness and murmuring, or, like Ananias and Saphira, secretly retaining a part of what belongs to God.

We declare that we love Jesus with our

whole hearts, and we promise again and again to cast away all that displeases Him; and yet how many vanities, how many undue affections, how much self-love still binds us to the earth. We repeat, sweet is Thy holy will; blessed are the ways of Thy providence; yet when sickness overtakes us; when disease has impaired our energies, and has taken away the charm from every pleasure of life; when suddenly the home of our youth is broken up; when, instead of affluence and honour, straitened means and even poverty are our portion for life, how often have we bitterly murmured and complained. When the friends of our sunshine fall away, and we find none but fellow-sufferers and children of misfortune to sympathise with us; when our lives are so isolated that there is not one to welcome us in our dreary abodes, or who would feel a void in their souls whenever death snatches us away, have we not scornfully asked, 'Where is the tender mercy that dwells in the skies?'

Have we not declared aloud that God was unjust? has not the shock been so violent as to make us abandon religion altogether for a time?

How hard, dear Jesus, it is to imitate Thee!

How difficult it is to give up anything we really love and cherish, whilst some things are so closely wound round our hearts that we dare not attempt to tear them off. But Thy hands, tender-hearted Lord, are more gentle than ours—do Thou then take them from us Thyself, do that for us, which we have not the courage to do for ourselves.

It is easy to be generous in resigning what has become valueless, and in turning from pleasures which have lost their attraction. We are courageous in serving Thee, but it must be in our own way. We are resolved to obey Thee, but we must have the helps we choose ; we are determined to go to heaven, but it must be by our own path ; and we are ready to resign all but what seems so much a part of ourselves, that we dare not and cannot touch it.

Jesus, Thou hast stripped Thyself of all for us, teach us to follow Thy example.. Empty our hearts and souls of all that displeases Thee ; teach us not to turn away like cowards from misfortunes and trials, because they are so many real oblations we can every moment offer Thee.

Give us true detachment from ourselves,

from creatures, and the world. Root out self-love from its hiding-places and mysterious recesses. And when our strength fails and sickness overtakes us, when our position and wealth suddenly collapse and disappear as broken bubbles, when the bonds of many years' friendship are severed for ever, do, we implore Thee, make us truly resigned.

When those who are dear to us have been torn away from us and buried in the grave, and when we are left alone to mourn their loss, instead of murmuring and repining—though our hearts be sorrowful and our eyes filled with tears—let us be deeply thankful Thou hast given us the use of Thy gifts so long, and let no impatient word or thought mar the gratitude, which on so many grounds are due to Thee. Make us ready, at whatever hour Thou callest, to give back all the rich blessings we now enjoy, not grudgingly, even though our hearts be engulfed with sadness, but in the spirit of holy Job, because they belong to Thee. Tell us how to be rich, but poor in spirit, how to use the things of the world, and at the same time to be utterly detached therefrom.

Tis a bitter lesson, but it must be learnt ;

and in time we may begin to feel some of that intense happiness, the saints enjoyed in the way of the Cross and in true detachment, which made them cry out, ' Either suffering or death, let life cease when there is no pain or misfortune.'

Dearest and best of Masters, we want to be Thy true disciples.

Break, then, every link except what fastens us closest to Thee, and if suffering be the road Thou choosest for us, willingly will we enter upon it to-day. Accept, we implore Thee, and bless the oblations we now make to Thee of all that we are, and all that we have, and of our very selves. Amen.

11. JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS.

And now comes the final scene, the last act of love, which ought never to be effaced from our memory.

Our Lord is stretched upon the Cross, and the executioners turn to us for the nails which are to pierce His hands and feet; and we have only to look into our past lives, and there are our sins of pride and disobedience,

of impurity, and vanity, and we give them with malicious eagerness, and they are thrust through those delicate hands from which we have received every blessing we hold dear, and through the feet weary and worn, in seeking after us.

And who can fathom the unspeakable agony, which rends the body and soul of Jesus on that terrible and ignominious death-bed? Listen, if you have the courage, to the blows of the hammer, driving the nails through His sacred flesh, muscles, and tendons! See how the flesh quivers and writhes, as His sacred body hangs on those rude iron bars, and thus for three weary hours He lingers, with thorns for His pillow, with rough wood for His bed, and with cutting nails for the chief support of His aching body.

In pity gaze on His blessed face, see His fevered and parched lips, hear how He gasps for breath, as from sheer exhaustion the blood begins to clot and fill His sacred mouth; and marble must be the heart, and steel the soul, that can stand by unmoved, or ever forget this dying lesson, which is to teach us how to bear the pangs and sorrows of death.

Expiring Saviour, in this moment of agony,

we know we ought not to approach ; none but Thy friends ought to draw near.

Mary is there, and John, and the Angels are there ; but Thou art not content.

For whom art Thou looking ? Thou art seeking Thy enemies ; and we, alas, are numbered among them, and Thou biddest us also draw near.

Dying Master, we obey Thy voice, and, overwhelmed with shame and sorrow, we kneel at the foot of Thy Cross.

O that we could live our lives again ?
O that we could undo the sins which have fastened Thee to the ignominious tree !

Jesus, Son of David, pardon and forgive us, and never will we crucify Thee again. Blot out our fearful sins, and we promise, with all the fervour of our souls, to bear willingly all the pain and suffering which may accompany our last hour, as a little compensation for the unutterable agony, our ingratitude and treachery have caused Thee, on the Cross.

Dearest Lord, what our death-bed may be, is hidden in Thy Omniscience. It may be a lengthened weary illness, when poor human nature, too long and too sorely besieged, will gladly surrender whenever the time comes.

It may be some terrible disease, with pain so acute and anguish so intense, that our friends will turn away unable to witness such excruciating agony. It may be some short sudden struggle, when the torture is so intensified that the sufferings of weeks are contained in one short hour or less. But whatever it is, or whenever it is, we now most readily accept it; and we firmly promise to bear it patiently and resignedly, because we are sure it will be little or nothing, compared to what Thou enduredst on the Cross for our sakes.

But who can think of the terrors of those last moments and not tremble? who can realise the agony of that last struggle, and not feel the perspiration stand in horror on his brow? Yet, most loving of friends, if Thou wilt stand by us, if Thou wilt help us, as Thou surely wilt, if Thou wilt make us gaze steadfastly on the wounds in Thy hands and feet, whatever the excruciating pain may be, it will be easy to bear. Nail, we beseech Thee, our hearts to Thy Cross; here we will remain, and no creature shall ever persuade us to leave Thy death-bed; here we will live, and here we implore Thee to let us die.

All ye martyrs, who smiled at death in the cruellest form tyrant hearts could invent, intercede for us.

St. John, whose martyrdom was the boiling cauldron, help us to imitate your undaunted courage in suffering.

St. Laurence, whose last couch was a broiling gridiron, pray that we may bear the agonies of our death tranquilly, resignedly, and cheerfully, like you.

St. Joseph, who with overflowing joy and peace bade adieu to this world with Jesus on one side and Mary on the other, help us in our last hour, banish all fear and terror far away, and let our end be like yours.

Grant, we implore you, dear Lady, that your beloved Son may come to us in the Holy Viaticum, and then we must be calm and happy, because the struggle will soon be over. Our last adieu to the world must be full of joy, because then the sun will shortly rise that knows no setting; the day is about to dawn that has no night, bright, unclouded, with rest and joy and peace, that no heart can comprehend and no tongue can utter.

Angels and saints, look down on us and grant our request. Amen.

12. JESUS DIES UPON THE CROSS.

Jesus has uttered His last words ; the rude spear has torn open His side, and He has given His last sigh ; and He now hangs lifeless and dead on the ignominious tree, His heart broken open with love of us.

Let us draw near and learn how to die with Jesus. Our Lord knew how the prospect of death terrifies and subdues the strongest hearts, and so to empty our souls of fear, He would go before us over that dreary and solitary abyss.

Loving Jesus, we could not believe Thy word, that leaving this world was only a passage to a truer and better life ; and so, like a tender-hearted father, who walks through some dark corridor to prove to his frightened child that the spectres he dreads, exist not ; ay, even as a fond mother who wants to humour the foolishness of her child, in the excess of her love, will taste some bitter medicine first, to encourage him ; so Thou didst walk through the paths of the tomb, and taste the bitterness of death, that we might not shrink from following Thy loving

example. And thus the last proof of Thy love is given.

All the grief we can suffer, every form of pain we can endure, Thou hast borne ; and now even the agony of death Thou dost pass through for our sakes.

O, tender, loving Lord, prepare for us a happier death-bed than we have given Thee. Thou hast gone through that awful moment alone ; but we have no such strength. We know that then everything must be left behind, that every link must be broken, and every earthly help will be vain. Even Thy Church can only follow us to the environs of the other world ; but she cannot accompany us into that unknown and mysterious land.

Thou only, dear Jesus, canst be with us in that fearful journey.

Well may we be terrified at that awful moment, and turn from the contemplation thereof in dread. Yet why fear, if we are with Thee, and if Thou wilt carry us over the abyss in Thy arms ? Be with us in these last moments, we crave and implore Thee, and we will be content ; for then to the greatest terror we can experience Thou wilt join the greatest

joy, and to the most bitter moment a delight surpassing all its fears,

Dearest Lord, as in that last hour our senses may fail us, and our tongues refuse their utterance, we wish now to do what then we may not be able to accomplish. We now most willingly accept our death, whenever and in whatever way it may please Thee to call us. So resigned are we, that if Thou wert to give us the choice thereof, we would yield it cheerfully back again into Thy hands, fully confident that Thou wilt do what is best for us in that final hour. Therefore let death come at the third, the sixth, or the ninth hour, let it be in the sunshine of summer or in the coldness of winter, and we are satisfied. But, in any event, make us always stand prepared, with our lamps trimmed and burning in our hands, and our accounts in order, ready and glad to bid adieu to the world whenever the Bridegroom may call.

And when the end comes, grant, we implore Thee, that every moment of that last struggle may be spent united with Thee. Grant that every hour thereof may be filled with ejaculations of sorrow and love.

And when our eyes grow dim and our

senses fail, make every pulsation, every beat of our hearts, every struggling breath, be so many fervent desires of resignation and repentance.

But if in that final battle, it pleases Thee to leave us the possession of our reason, we promise to make repeated and continual acts of loving contrition, which shall be elicited purely for Thy own dear sake, and not from the mere selfish motive of obtaining reward, or the slavish fear of Thy chastisements. We are resolved to bear the pain, the weariness, the anguish of those last moments without a murmur ; resignedly, even gladly, that we may thereby cancel the temporal punishment that is due to our past sins and ingratitude, and so to avoid the excruciating fires of Purgatory.

But if, alas, through weakness, we fail in these resolutions, ye choice and loving friends who will stand round our death-bed, be friends indeed to us in that last hour. Whisper to us motives of patience. Repeat with us short fervent words of contrition and love. Rehearse to us that beautiful, consoling and golden truth which all theologians hold ; that little act of perfect sorrow, with confession, or without it when a priest cannot

be had, if it be intense enough, remits all our sins, however numerous and revolting, and all the temporal punishment due to them. Often assure us, if we thus truly and deeply mourn for our sins, we may humbly hope that as soon as death comes, without any hindrance or passing through Purgatory, our souls will go straight to Heaven, and we shall hear those thrilling words of our Blessed Lord as the soul parts from the body, 'This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.' (Luke xxiii. 43.)

But, whatever may be the circumstances attending our departure from this world, do Thou, Beloved Jesus, stand by our side. Bend over our death-bed, whisper words of comfort and courage to our wearied souls, and then sweet, calm, and happy will our end be, because the moment the struggle is over and our eyes are closed on this world, we shall be with Thee and go with Thee to that bright home, where there are no clouds, no thorns, no tears, nor sorrow or parting, nor death any more, but where our abode will be in unclouded happiness for ever and ever. Fiat, fiat! Amen.

13. JESUS IS LAID IN THE ARMS OF HIS MOTHER.

The nails are extracted from our Saviour's hands and feet, His sacred body is taken down from the Cross, and once more our dearest Lady holds her Son in her arms, not now a smiling Child, but a cold lifeless corpse, and for a few moments He is all her own again. She gave Him up to us, the most beautiful among the children of men; and we return Him to her, mangled, tortured, and killed by our sins; and now she folds round Him, not the swaddling-clothes, but the winding-sheet. O, gaze well on that afflicted Mother and her dead child!

It was not you, dear Lady, who inflicted these wounds you are now kissing with love and adoration, and reverently closing. We are the culprits, and though we have tortured and destroyed your Son, you will not surely send us away. We are aghast and horrified when we see what we have done; but look upon us and encourage us, even in your unspeakable sorrow.

Draw us nearer to Him, and whilst He lies

cold and lifeless in your arms, let us look at the wounds in His feet, still torn and bleeding from the rude iron which so cruelly pierced them ; let us gaze upon His hands, which once poured the water of baptism on our souls, and have been so often laid on our heads to bless us—the hands that have fed us with His own flesh and blood, and which in return we have nailed to the Cross. But more than all, let us fix our eyes on the wide-opened wound in His side, that seems to ask us what more He could have done for us ; that bids us say if that heart ever turned from us, or was cold to our appeals, and if now, after it is broken open for our sakes, we will at last believe in its never-failing love for us.

O, dearest Lord and Master, we undoubtingly believe in the undying affection of Thy tender and Sacred Heart, and never more shall doubts or misgivings find a place in our souls.

Come, then, let us kiss these wounds, and as our tears stream down, and our hearts beat sore with sorrow, would that we could breathe our souls therein, that there they might rest, and never offend or forget any

more One who has loved us with such mysterious and incomprehensible love.

And now, dear Mother, help us, we implore of you, to imitate you in your sad and heart-breaking bereavement. We know that great as the sea was your sorrow, that every look on your dead Child drove the sword of Simeon deeper into your soul; but though all that made the world dear, and for which your heart beat, or could beat, was lifeless and cold before you, though you were left alone in a dreary world, you were calm and resigned, and willingly gave back that Child, dearer to you than creation, though the struggle was like the severing of soul and body. O, may it be so in our sorrows and bereavements! When we have to stand over the dead bodies of those we love best; when we kiss their cold lips and pour our grief into their ears, and there is no answer; when our guiding-star has set, and the sun that brightened the world has been extinguished; when we feel it would be sweet to be allowed to lie down at their sides and die; and when our isolation and despondency is so overwhelming, that we are tempted to rebel, remind us, dear Mother, of your unutterable sorrow; let the picture of

Jesus mangled and dead in the lap of His broken-hearted Mother come vividly before us, and however unfathomable our grief may be, however profound our affliction, we shall be able to say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.' (Luke xxii. 42.) 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. . . . Blessed be the Name of the Lord.' (Job. i. 21.) 'Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight.' (Matt. xi. 26.)

Queen of Sorrows, teach us how to mourn and to be resigned; help us to give back to God the child, or parent, or friend, or spouse, the dearest and the best, whenever the Master calls them, however cutting and bitter the struggle may be. Let us always remember that whatever we have is lent to us by God, and let us be deeply grateful, that we have been allowed the use thereof, for so long a time.

Give us courage to put ourselves utterly and implicitly in God's hands; so that in all the events of life, we may practise holy indifference, which is a loving, ready, and unreluctant acquiescence in God's Will, and in all the dispositions of His Providence. Teach us to banish the delusion that holy

indifference consists in being granite-hearted, unfeeling, and imperturbable as stones. Remind us in our affliction, that we can possess this priceless virtue, though the tears be rolling down our cheeks, though the sobs be stifling our utterance, and though our souls be tossed and shattered with anguish, if in the midst of our overwhelming affliction we say in all sincerity and earnestness, 'Father, if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from me: but yet not my will, but Thine be done,' (Luke xxii. 42). Teach us to keep before us the picture of Jesus, weeping over the grave of Lazarus; and, later on, prostrate in the Garden, in such agonies of grief that the Blood is forced from every pore of His Sacred Body; and obtain for us that holy indifference which unites the profoundest feelings, the deepest sorrow, and the most perfect conformity to God's Will.

Blessed Mother standing by the Cross, and whose sorrow was so immense that you cried out, 'O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow;' (Lam. i. 12,) help us to imitate your heroic example.

St. Jane Frances de Chantal, who in tears

and anguish didst try three times to leave your children and to enter a convent, and as many times didst fail, and who in the end could only bid adieu to them with a faltering tongue, and with a bosom heaving with emotion and sorrow, help us to copy your tender-hearted resignation.

St. Francis of Sales, who, though expecting the death of your father, wert so afflicted at the news that you were obliged to retire in private to recover yourself, and to delay the service, though a crowded congregation was waiting; teach us, we beseech you, your holy indifference, your resignation to God's Will, which will make us leave ourselves with child-like confidence in God's hands, to do as He pleases with us, and with all we possess, however vast our loss may be, however unutterable our grief. Grant, we implore you, that it may be so. Amen.

14. JESUS IS LAID IN THE SEPULCHRE.

'Tis hard at first to realise the death of those we love, or to believe it otherwise than

a dream; nor did the Blessed Virgin fully comprehend her sorrows and her loss, till again and again she opened the eyes of her Child, and, instead of their bright glance, she found them glassy and fixed, till she sobbed aloud for Him to speak and there was no answer, till her overflowing grief for an instant made her heart stand still, when His cold dead body was taken from her to be embalmed for the funeral.

And now comes the last scene, now is the final sorrow which saddened all her days. She gazes on her Child for the last time, she gives Him the last kiss, she utters the last farewell, and then, calm and resigned as the billows of grief dash over her, she sees Him laid in the grave, and the stone rolled against the entrance; and leaning on the beloved disciple, she returns to her solitary home, alone in a dreary world, every light extinguished, every flower withered, spouseless and childless, and nothing left her but the hard thorns of life.

Queen of Sorrows, what shall we say to comfort you?

O that we had never sinned, then there would have been no grave, and no broken-

hearted Mother sobbing over her dead Child.

But as a poor compensation, let us offer you at least, dearest Mother, our hearts to be the sepulchre of your Son.

You know how often we have given them to you, when you were seeking some poor refuge in Bethlehem, and now we offer them once more as a tomb for your Child.

But, alas, it was a new sepulchre in which He was laid ; and dare we give you hearts no longer new, but where wrong affections have been ; nay worse, even rottenness and corruption. Yet the love of Jesus will forgive even that, and we beg that He may work such a change in our hearts that they may be renewed and made fit for His abode.

Do you then, dear Mother, with your own hands place Him there, and allow nothing wrong ever to come where He has been, for our hearts must now be kept holy for ever. Let it be so, dear Mother. Watch over them yourself, and take us out of life rather than suffer His temple to be ever desecrated.

But, alas, what can heal your own bleeding, sorrowing heart ? What can turn the tide of your mighty grief, but that which is

dearest to you—your Son? Yet, dear Lady, under those dark clouds which hang over His tomb, there is a bright rainbow, which gives you sweet and certain hope.

You know, you feel, that yet three days and your Son will rise again. That yet a little while, and His countenance will beam upon you, His eyes will gaze upon you, and you will hear His voice, and feel that He is your own again.

Were it not for this hope, which like a star lit up her soul, never would that Mother have left that tomb alive; her mighty sorrow, like some impetuous torrent, would have burst its banks, and her heart would have severed in sorrow, so deep was her love for her Son.

And now, dearest Mother, teach us to follow your example. Help us to bear our biggest sorrows with tranquil submission, though every nerve may quiver with emotion, and though tears may pour down in torrents. When we bend over the lifeless bodies of those who are dearest; when stunned by the sudden blow, we realise not our grief, till we have seen parent, friend, child, or spouse laid in the coffin, carried to the grave, and heard the damp clay thrown upon them; and when

in a paroxysm of grief we are tempted to rebel, and to demand in mercy that God would end our wretched solitary lives ; O, then remind us that there is a rainbow over every grave ; whisper to us that yet a little while and the loved dead ones will rise, that we shall hear their sweet voices again, and love them with an intimate and personal love ; and such hope will soothe the sorest, the most aching hearts, and will calm the wildest dashings of the most uncontrollable sorrow.

Let us never forget that death is not the end of life, and the extinction of all our joys ; that it is but the beginning of life never ending and happiness undying. Remind us that death is but a dark cloud, which envelopes us for a while, and then it bursts and all is bright day ; that the grave is only the dark unfurnished ante-chamber, where we rest for a while, and then the curtains are raised, and the portals are opened, and we are in the clear vision of God.

Do teach us, Queen of Sorrows, not to fear death. Instil into our souls that death is to the Christian, what the harbour is to the wave-tossed mariner ; what the harvest is to the husbandman. That its summons is like the sweet ringing of some silver bell at even-

tide, telling us that the day's labour is over, that sorrow and tribulation there shall be no more, nor tears, nor mourning any more, for the bright, and happy, and glorious day of eternity has begun.

Help us, we implore of you, to make us ashamed to fear death, which is to unite us for ever to those we love, when we are so often proclaiming that we would give worlds for a few years to enjoy the love and friendship of those who are our guiding-stars; that we would encounter any peril, and journey to the antipodes, to breathe the same air, to dwell under the same roof, with those who are the idols of our souls. Do not let us be so cowardly, as to sicken and shudder at the thought of the momentary shock of passing through the gates of death, when we know it is to join those dear friends in heaven, not for a score of years, but never endingly, whose absence is making our hearts so sad and the world so dreary.

Assist us, who are so ready to suffer pain, and want, and privation for those we love, to give up sin, and to guard our friends from sin; which is the only thing that can wither our loves and friendships, never to bloom again, and cause us utterly to be separated eternally.

Let us never forget, that there can be no true Christian love and friendship, which sacrifices the friend's soul, for the sake of his body.

Dearest Mother, make this belief entwine itself round the fibres of our souls, and then we shall learn to stand calmly and resignedly at the graves of those who are dearest. And though our hearts be sore, and our eyes swollen with weeping, as we gaze on the wild-flowers growing over their resting-place, and the golden flies playing in the long grass; we shall feel with joy in our hearts that the very moment the soul leaves the body we shall be united with them in our Father's home, never to be separated.

Alas, the fondest and the dearest must part. Yes; we must see all that makes the world bright and happy buried in the tomb; and God knows how our hearts quail and shudder at the prospect! But we now accept this greatest trial, greater than our own death, the death of those with whom our happiness is entwined; and though our whole frame may be tossed and convulsed at their loss, we are determined to mourn like those who have hope, and to mingle joy with our grief, because yet a little while and the dark night

will have passed, and a glorious never-ending day will break, when, without sorrow, or clouds, or separation, we shall rest in the unclouded happiness of heaven for ever and ever.

God grant we may thus mourn, because then we shall be surely comforted. Amen.

LET US PRAY.

We have finished the sad and painful journey of the Way of the Cross. We have contemplated, dear Jesus, Thy agonising sufferings. We have mourned over the sorrows which sickened Thy soul well-nigh unto death, and we have felt at times so courageous to endure pain, and humiliation, and privation, that for the moment we seemed different men and women.

O never, we implore Thee, let the lights and inspirations Thou has favoured us with, the resolutions we have so generously sent up to heaven during these meditations, be ever darkened, much less obliterated from our souls !

Write indelibly on our hearts, that tribulation and misfortunes are sent to break the

bonds which bind us to the earth and to creatures, and to draw us even as gravitation to our only true centre—God. Teach us to feel that, however dear our friends are, and however secret their sympathy, there are bitter harrowing hours when no friend can be near; sadnesses and aching void so deep down in our souls that no hand can touch them; perplexities and peculiarities so entangled, that no intelligence can unravel them; and force us vividly to remember that Thou alone, dear Jesus, can be with us every instant, every moment of the night and day. Let us never forget that Thou alone canst truly sympathise with us, and canst fully realise the sorrows and entangled difficulties which no one else knows or can understand. Teach us to comprehend the intense sweetness which would follow; how the whole aspect of our lives would be changed, if Thou, dear Jesus, hadst the supremacy of our hearts, and if we could always sit at Thy feet, or rest on Thy bosom, during those days of bitter sorrow and nights of agonising pain, when nothing human can comfort or console us.

Dearest Lord, be Thou our guiding-star, the magnet ever attracting our hearts and thoughts constantly to Thee. Let no idol ever

come between us and Thee. Let our friends, true as they are, genuine as they are, priceless though they be, as gems brought from afar, be but as satellites brightening our way to Thee, powers to check the adverse currents, which would drive us from our path to Thee.

Do this, and we will never again sin, never again will we be cowards, or murmur in trials and afflictions.

Then, if there are black clouds over our path, the bright sunshine will make us forget them ; if there are thorns, the flowers will be so beautiful we shall not heed them ; if there are afflictions, the consolation will be so abundant that their bitterness will be forgotten. Then we shall begin to taste that the Lord is indeed sweet. Then our lives will have a calmness and a happiness we never before experienced. Then we shall begin to understand what a pious person felt, who said, 'I never knew it was so sweet to love God ;' and we shall bring home to our souls the rapturous feeling of joy in a saint who used to exclaim, 'Why, O why has God commanded me to love Him, and given me but one heart, and that so little !' Fiat, fiat ! Amen.

